
COINS

Penny and owner caught in a vise

By Roger Boye

This week's column answers more questions from Chicago Tribune readers.

Q—My 1970 penny has a "wheat ear" design engraved into the heads side, on top of Abe Lincoln. What might it be worth? Also, are Buffalo nickels without dates valuable?—O.R., Chicago.

A—Your cent is a worthless "fake error." Most likely, someone placed your coin and another Lincoln cent together in a vise, forcing part of the wheat ear design onto your penny. The other coin was dated 1958 or earlier because in 1959 the government started making cents with the Lincoln Memorial reverse.

Buffalo nickels without dates have only a nominal value to collectors.

Q—After straining my eyes to tell the difference between the tiny "P" and "D" mint marks on 1981 dimes, I wondered why the government bothers to put mint marks on coins. Do they serve any purpose?—G.J., Elmhurst.

A—Historically, mint marks have allowed bureaucrats to more quickly trace the source of poorly made coins or coins that contain improper amounts of gold or silver. In modern-day America, with coins made only in base metals, mint marks have little functional value, other than to publicize the location of government mints.

Q—Four years ago we received several Eisenhower silver dollars in change. How much are they worth these days?—T.L., Glen Ellyn.

A—Contrary to popular belief, all Eisenhower dollars made for circulation contain copper and nickel only, no silver. Even "brand new" specimens minted between 1971 and 1978 have little special value on the market.

Uncle Sam did produce some Ike dollars with silver and copper, but all of the coins were sold to collectors in special holders. The retail value of those dollars usually ranges from about \$7 to \$80, depending on date and type.